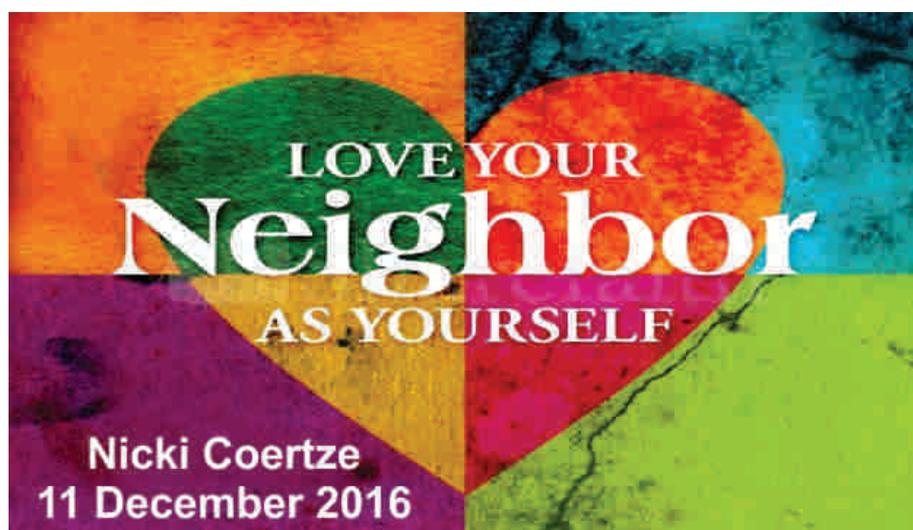


A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION COMMANDED BY CHRIST (PART 2) THE GREAT COMMANDMENT - LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR



Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV) ³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

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"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

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And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

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This is the great and first commandment.

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And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

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On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

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Introduction.

We continue today with the New Year's Resolution according to Christ. This topic has been preached on before, but we need to hear it again and again, because it is vital for the unity of the congregation. It is through repetition that we are reminded of those things we hold dear, and then we also have the reality of many people absent weekly who miss particular sermons.

What will Jesus desire from us. Well, I believe it is to be faithful to the Great Command or the First Command. I guess if Jesus says it is the greatest, well, then it is. Last week we saw that he shut out the Lawyer from making any more comments based on the other 612 commands. So, I guess, we do not have much option do we. You are left with very little options outside the other 612.

We saw last week that the whole law and the prophets hang on these two commandments, which means that **love is the origin of the law and the prophets**, and **love is the goal of the Law and the Prophets**

. It is the beginning and the end of why God inspired the Bible. If we do not love then our faith is relegated to orthodoxy and dead doctrine which is like an empty well. Until we have sorted out our love and commitment to God the second command that is like the first one will not be fulfilled in the life of the believer, because why will I be sold out to my neighbour when I am not sold out to

their and my

creator.

It's **the first commandment** that makes the second commandment doable and takes away the threat that the second commandment is really the suicide of our own happiness. People are so afraid to love their neighbour as they love themselves, because they are afraid of the cost. I

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believe that at the root the second commandment is an expression of the first and that is what I want to show you today.

So let's turn to the second commandment this morning which is: "39...You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Because of the demands contained in this commandment this is maybe the most threatening sermon I can preach to Logos this morning. It is radical, it is critical and it is what Christianity is all about. The biggest threat to this command is self and pride and my own personal identity and desires. I remember a sermon years ago in which the preacher said we need to become mash potato Christians instead of just boiled potatoes. A boiled potato keeps its identity amongst the other potatoes in the pot, but as soon as you mash it we lose our identity and we become one. That is what Christianity is all about, it is that oneness. It is not about particular people having prominence in the body, it is not about the gifted, it is not about the rich, it is not about the poor, it is about being a people that glorify God together and exalt Him together as one. But any sermon like this of course firstly has to challenge me as it is my life that is under scrutiny, because the focus of Jesus is personal as seen in the words 'as yourself'. That brings me to my first point this morning which is:

1. Love for self.

The departure point for loving my neighbour is self-love. There is a very big word in the text here which is '**as**'. Love your neighbour '**as**' you love yourself. Love for self is a given, it is an accepted fact, it is not commanded. We even see this in the challenge by Paul to men in Ephesians 5 with regards to their wives, where he says that they must love their wives '**as**'

they love themselves. We all know what that is all about. This is common to all people, and by the way, in and of itself it is not evil. You don't have to learn to love yourself. It comes with your humanity. Our Father in heaven created it. In and of itself it is good, because without it none would survive. To hunger for food is not evil. To want to be warm in the winter is not evil. To want to be safe in a crisis is not evil. To want to be healthy during a plague is not evil. To want to be liked by others is not evil. To want your life to count in some significant way is not evil. To want to have fun is not evil. To want to win in sport or another competition is not evil. This was a defining human trait before the fall of man into sin, and it is not evil in itself. When I am so absorbed with self-love, and I fail in loving God and my neighbour, it is then that it becomes a sin. But self-love is natural as it is our preservation.

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So think of what Christ is saying when He says this. He is basically saying that if you are going to love your neighbour as you love yourself, you are going to be willing to **tear your skin off yourself** and put it onto your neighbour before you look at him. So before I look at the poor, I tear my skin off me and I put it on them, before I look at the rich I tear my skin of me and put it on them, before I look at another race, I tear my skin of me and I put it on them, before I look at my boss at work or my employee, I tear my skin off and I put it on them, before I look at my husband or wife, I tear my skin of me and I put it on them and so we can go on. Because with my skin on them, it is going to be so much easier to love them as I love myself. Church family, this is radical. A more common way to state it is to put yourself in their shoes and then to love the way you would like to be loved. It fits with the words of Christ in Matthew 7:12 (ESV)

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“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Sadly, we far too often leave that for the pastor to do. He must love, he must care, he must provide, he must bend over backwards, because we pay him a salary to do so. Last time I read Ephesians 4 it said that my role is to equip you for your works of service. I am only one man. I agree with Spurgeon where he said that he will rather have 10 men doing the work required by 10 men, than him doing the work.

Now let me set something straight here immediately. The body of Christ often attracts people who are poor and needy and down and out because they believe that somehow the body of Christ must be a giving community, and they have needs so the church is the place to go to meet those needs. Now that is true, because the Lord does say in: John 13:34 (ESV) ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

We can add many verses to this one from 1 John etc. The church is for down and outs, but the church is not just for down and outs, the church is for all people. If the church was just for down and outs and the 'haves' give everything they have to the 'have not's' then everybody will be 'have not's' and nobody will have the joy anymore to be able to be a blessing to one another. The love commandments are for all. It is not simply given to those who have, so that they can just take care of those who don't have. Read the gospels, look at the Words of Christ and you will understand what the Kingdom is all about. It is horizontal love between all, and not just vertical love simply from the top to the bottom, because **love is not just about material goods.**

The fullness of Scripture needs to be understood here. Let me explain this to you. People love to grab to the prophets and some of their statements about the poor and needy, and then they simply try and apply it to the church. If we are going to do that then we need to apply all the Old

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Testament laws to the church as well, and in the text before us we see that the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. **All the texts in the Old Testament that you read that refers to rich and poor and their responsibility towards one another, must be understood in the context of a nation.**

The prophets are addressing a physical nation and in a nation your membership and the structures are different than in the church. You are born into a nation, you and your family are part of the nation, you can be wicked, you can be righteous and you still belong to the nation, and you fall under the rules of a nation. The nation can tax you, so everybody will play their part if they like it or not. Even today we live within a nation, we live in the context of families and there are certain duties and responsibilities that we have within the nation and within our families that is primarily mine and mine alone. For example, there are certain responsibilities and duties that I have towards my children and there are certain responsibilities and duties I have towards my parents that is my duty and not my neighbour's duty.

The church on the other hand is the **household of God**, we are a church family, and the way I become part of the church family is to be born again in Christ and to become a responsible member of the body of Christ. I join because I love God, I join to exercise my gifts, and on this topic of gifts we must realise that there is no 'gift of receiving' among the gifts in the Bible. I read this in a book somewhere years ago where a pastor said:

"my church is filled with people with only one gift and that is the 'gift of receiving'. They always take and take, but they never give back. As far as they are concerned the rest of the body exists for them and their needs, but from their side they do nothing to reciprocate"

You cannot expect the rest of the body to take their skin off and put it on you, to love you and your needs like they would if they were in your situation, but you will not take off your skin and put it on them and realise just how you would have felt if everybody lives for you and you do nothing in return. Whatever end of the spectrum we are on as far as means and riches are concerned, we have to be a conduit of God's grace upon our lives. We are not allowed to be sponges. If you are a sponge then you are suffering of the sin of pride, as it is all about you. Sadly, I have far too often seen people joining the church, pretending to be spiritual for the sake of what they can get out of the church, but they continue in their old habits on the side. More than often when their needs are fully met, they run away. That is why the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself goes both ways. **It is all of us loving all of us, as we would love ourselves.**

If some who just receive and receive would just put themselves in the shoes of the givers they should be honest and say:
"I would not like to just be on the 'giving end' with my neighbour always on the 'receiving end', it would be nice at times if they would think of me a little as well."

So that brings us to our second point and that is to "love my neighbour as myself".

2. Love for my neighbour.

Christian, you need to hear me clearly now. If we are going to be successful as far as the second commandment is concerned, we must realise that it is directly linked to the first. Paul understood this. Remember in Ephesians 5 where he talks about the role of the husband and wife. Each statement is linked to 'as Christ'. Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church. Wives, submit to your husbands, as the church submits to Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Let's come back to the commandments. Love your neighbour as you love yourself, because you understand what it is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Because you are doing that, loving your neighbour becomes easy. Let me put it this way. Loving God is not a cancelling of self-love, it is a fulfilment of self-love without which it is impossible to love my neighbour. Why do I say so? Because, **when God is your never-ending fountain of our joy—the way we love ourselves and others is forever changed.**

What is Jesus commanding in the second commandment? **He is commanding that our self-love, which has now discovered its fulfilment in God-love, be the measure and the content of our neighbour-love.**

Or,

to put it another way, he is commanding that our

inborn self-seeking, which has now been transposed into God-seeking, overflow and extend itself to our neighbour.

So, for example:

- If you are longing to see more of God's provision for your needs, then you must allow your self-love to firstly express itself in God love, and then extend to neighbour love, otherwise you are too consumed with self, and you will never enjoy full contentment. So, let the fulfilment of your own self-love in God-love overflow into neighbour love. And we are not talking material care only.

- If you want to enjoy more of God's compassion through the comfort he gives you in times of sorrow, then seek to show others more of God's compassion through the comfort you extend to your neighbour in their times of sorrow.

- If you long to savour more of God's wisdom through the counsel he gives in stressful relationships, then seek to extend more of God's wisdom to others in their stressful relationships.

- If you delight in seeing God's goodness in relaxed times of leisure, then extend that goodness to others by helping them to also have a relaxed, healthy times of leisure.

- If you want to see more of God's saving grace powerfully manifested in your life, then stretch out that grace into the lives of others who need that saving grace.

- If you want to enjoy more of the riches of God's personal friendship through thick and

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thin, then extend that friendship to the lonely through thick and thin.

- If you want to enjoy your love for God through an uninterrupted time of worship, then love your neighbour by allowing them that uninterrupted time of worship by being on time.

In all these ways neighbour-love does not threaten self-love because self-love has become God-love, and God-love is not threatened, diminished, or exhausted by being poured into the lives of others.

There are times that real love for my neighbour has to be tuff love, sometimes real love has to be accompanied by the answer 'no' when your button is pressed upon. Sometimes they must struggle to learn, because at times by simply dropping everything to respond to their needs you are actually aiding them in their sin, and it is sometimes difficult to know when I am doing that and when not.

I have seen strange things in the ministry. I have seen people being supported by the body who at the end of the day actually should have supported others in the body. Too often I see rich people pleading poverty, and they ride on the ticket of others. I have supported people over the years who are far more affluent than I, but they are irresponsible, and bad stewards of their time and money, and then they ride on the back of others who are good stewards of their time and money.

In closing:

So church family, start with your love for God, get it right, improve on it, because loving God sustains us through all the joy and pain and perplexity and uncertainty of what loving our neighbour should be. When the sacrifice is great, we remember that His grace is sufficient. When the fork in the road of love is unmarked, we remember with joy and love that His grace is sufficient. When we are distracted by the world and our hearts give way temporarily to selfishness and we are off the path, we remember that God alone can satisfy, and we repent and love His all-sufficient grace all the more.

So whenever you think of the great commandment, remember that in the first commandment Jesus focuses the passion to be happy firmly set on God and God alone. In the second

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commandment Jesus opens a whole world of expanding joy in God and says: people, human beings, everywhere you find them, are designed to receive and enlarge your joy in God. Love them the way you love yourself. Show them – through every practical means available – what you have found for yourself in God, and remember that this commandment is for all of us, and not just for your pastor or a select few.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria

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